



# WildlifeCampus

Learn-Protect-Save



# Tour Guide to the Free State



## **Contents of this course**

### **Module # 1 - Understanding the Free State**

**Component # 1** - The Free State landscape and identity

### **Module # 2 - Culture, people and history**

**Component # 1** - Meet the Basotho and other communities

**Component # 2** - History and heritage across the Free State

### **Module # 3 - Wild places and nature reserves**

**Component # 1** - Wildlife, conservation and the environment

### **Module # 4 - Cities, towns and travel routes**

**Component # 1** - Bloemfontein and the Motheo region

**Component # 2** - Goldfields and Lejweleputswa towns

**Component # 3** - N1, N6 and western Free State towns

**Component # 4** - Eastern Free State and the Highlands Route

**Component # 5** - Towns between the N1 and N3 corridor

### **Module # 5 - Final reflections for Free State guiding**

**Component # 1** - Guide the Free State with insight and care

# This is a free component

If you haven't bought this course, you can only access this **single free component**.

Feel free to complete as many free components as you'd like; they're designed to give you an idea of our online courses.

However, **no certificates** are issued for free components.

To access the full course, visit our **shop** or email us at **[info@wildlifecampus.com](mailto:info@wildlifecampus.com)** to request an invoice.



## Disclaimer

**This course is part of the WildlifeCampus Tour Guide Series, created to inform, inspire, and equip learners with a broad understanding of South Africa's provinces, people, history, and natural heritage.** While it is designed to support tour guide development and enhance general knowledge, it does not qualify a person as a registered tourist guide under South African legislation or any official global guiding authority.

Completing this course does not grant legal registration, certification, or licensing to operate as a tourist guide in South Africa or elsewhere. If you wish to become a legally registered guide, please consult the appropriate provincial or national tourism authority in your region.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the content at the time of writing. However, WildlifeCampus cannot be held responsible for any changes to laws, travel regulations, or regional updates that may occur after publication. We also take no responsibility for actions taken or not taken based on the information presented in this course.

**This course is intended for educational and personal enrichment purposes only.**



## Welcome to WildlifeCampus

**Upon completing the full course, WildlifeCampus will automatically be notified and will contact you by email for your certificate information** (please check your junk/trash folders for emails you may have missed from us).

**No need to contact us to let us know you are done.**

**Note:** certificates will only be issued once all student fees or subscriptions have been **paid in full**.

### Important notes:

**Take the test on the top right-hand side** of the component page. This is where you will take the test once you have read the full component. Keep taking the tests until you complete all the components in the course. You will then automatically graduate.

**Download the PDF on the top right-hand side** of the component page. This is where you will download our course content in PDF format.

### An important note on our test questions

The assessment philosophy of WildlifeCampus does not require students to memorise thousands of facts. Instead, the tests are designed so that students come to an understanding of the material. You may find that certain questions are not based directly on what is presented in the content. But why is this so?

**Many of these questions have been deliberately set to be as ambiguous, obscure, subjective, challenging and confusing as possible. At some points, perhaps even frustrating.** The challenge on our side is to provide a quality assessment of the content without making it a simple comprehension of the text.

To this end, we attempt to make each question one that you must stop and think about. It is a device to ensure students understand and apply the content, but most importantly, to **come to their own conclusions**.

## Facts and a pinch of salt

The tour-guiding world is built on a mix of hard facts, local legends, evolving history, cultural interpretation, and plenty of passionate storytelling. What we present in this course series reflects our current knowledge and understanding but also the unique voices and viewpoints that make South Africa what it is.

Some facts are fixed. The Drakensberg really is that tall, and Kimberley really does have a Big Hole. But many other things, like cultural customs, historical narratives, and even place names, can shift over time. Communities change. Perspectives deepen. What was once widely accepted may now be re-examined through new lenses.

The information you'll encounter here comes from a wide pool of sources: historians, anthropologists, geographers, travel writers, ecotourism professionals, local storytellers, museum curators, elders, cultural guides, and ordinary South Africans sharing their lived experiences. We've done our best to fact-check and present a balanced, respectful view, but no guidebook, course, or classroom can capture the full, living complexity of this country.

So, read with curiosity. Question what you hear. Follow up on the things that spark your interest. This course is a platform for learning, not a final word. And while we strive for accuracy, remember that even in tourism, the line between fact and folklore is sometimes blurry, and often, that's what makes it memorable.

And if a local tells you a story that sounds just a bit too good to be true... well, that's when you know you're getting the real South African experience.

## Glossary

All fields of science and travel have a vast amount of terminology and jargon, with biological science having more than most. Therefore, during our courses, you may encounter many new words. This very comprehensive list will assist you. You have full access to our glossary, which can be found **under the academic tab on our homepage**.

If you would like for us to email you the glossary in PDF format, send us an email request: **[info@wildlifecampus.com](mailto:info@wildlifecampus.com)**



# Module 1

## Component 1

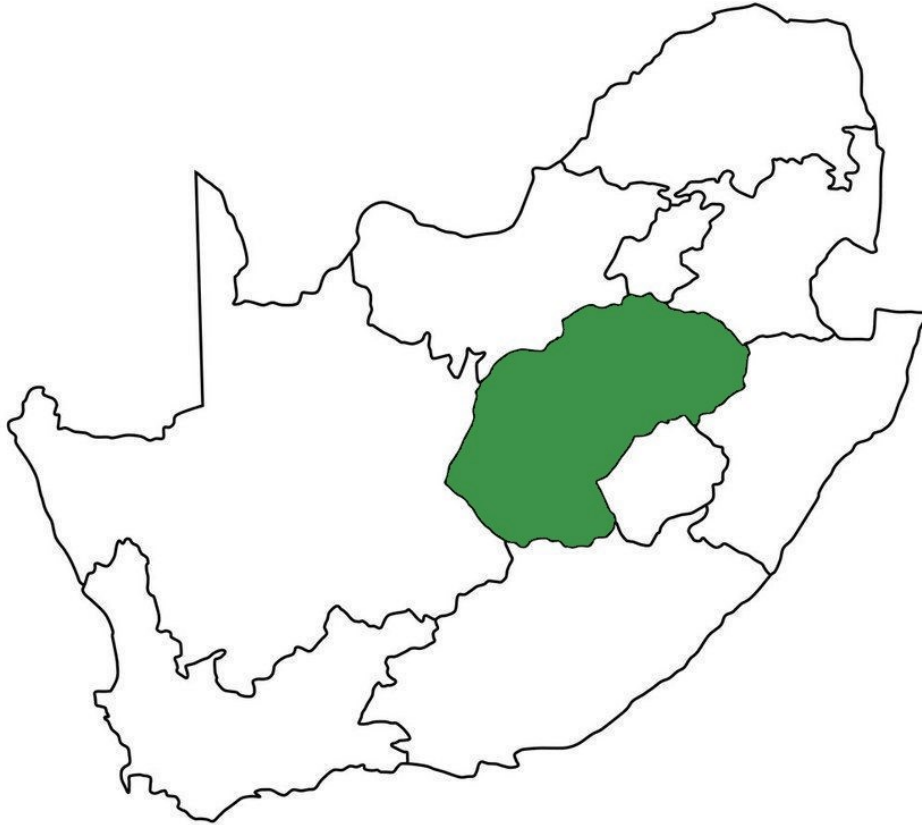


**The Free State  
landscape and identity**



## Welcome to the Free State

Welcome to the Free State. A place where the sky stretches wider, the wind carries dust and stories in equal measure, and roadside farm stalls are as common as bakkies with tired suspension. It is a province shaped by grasslands and goldfields, borderlines and belief systems. For a tour guide or traveller, it offers an experience that is quiet, surprising and often completely unexpected.



### Where is the Free State?

Right in the heart of South Africa. The Free State is a landlocked province bordered by six others, the Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, North West, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, as well as the country of Lesotho.

It acts as a natural and cultural bridge between the north and the south, the flat and the folded, the familiar and the overlooked.



## Free State fact file





**Capital city:** Bloemfontein (also South Africa's judicial capital)

**Area:** 129,825 km<sup>2</sup> (3rd largest province)

**Population:** ±2.96 million (2022)

**Density:** 23 people per km<sup>2</sup> (8th in SA)

### Major languages:

-  **Sesotho** (72.3%)
-  **Afrikaans** (10.3%)
-  **isiXhosa** (5.5%)
-  **Setswana** (5.3%)
-  **English** (1.5%)

**Main religion:** Christianity (92.7%).

### Metropolitan municipalities

Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality

### District municipalities

#### Fezile Dabi District:

Moqhaka  
Ngwathe  
Metsimaholo  
Mafube

#### Thabo Mofutsanyana District:

Setsoto  
Dihlabeng  
Maluti-a-Phofung  
Nketoana  
Phumelela  
Mantsopa





#### Lejweleputswa District:

Masilonyana  
Tokologo  
Tswelopele  
Matjhabeng  
Nala

#### Xhariep District:

Letsemeng  
Kopanong  
Mohokare

### Major cities and towns

-  Bloemfontein and Botshabelo in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality.
-  Welkom, Odendaalsrus and Virginia in Lejweleputswa.
-  Bethlehem, Harrismith and Phuthaditjhaba in Thabo Mofutsanyana.
-  Kroonstad, Sasolburg and Parys in Fezile Dabi.

## Coat of Arms



**Motto: Katleho ka kopano**

English: 'Prosperity through unity.'

**The new coat of arms consists of the following elements:**

- 🌿 **The indigenous Orange River Lily** (*Crinum bulbispermum*) is in the shield's centre.
- 🌿 **The blue and green shield** symbolises the green grasslands and the blue skies of the Province.
- 🌿 **The sandstone formations** of the Eastern Free State are represented by the top of the yellow shape.
- 🌿 **Two cheetahs** support the shield.
- 🌿 **The crown** on top of the shield consists of diamonds, mealie (maize)-cobs and ears of corn. These also bear witness to the agricultural and mining heritage of the Province.
- 🌿 **The earth** of the Free State is portrayed by the base of the coat of arms.



## Landscape and identity

### Landscapes that define the region

Forget mountains for a moment. The Free State is mostly highveld: wide, open grasslands. You will find:

- 🌿 **Flat agricultural plains**, perfect for maize, sunflowers and cattle.
- 🌿 **Rolling hills and koppies**, especially in the east.
- 🌿 **Vast skies**, often filled with dramatic clouds and sunsets.
- 🌿 **Dry riverbeds** and **muddy streams**, depending on the season.

Ashraf Sayed



In the east, the landscape lifts. Places like Clarens and the Golden Gate Highlands (image above) take on a sandstone drama that feels like another country. The west is drier, with Karoo influences creeping in. And in the centre, around Bloemfontein and the N1 corridor, it is all about movement, people and commercial farming.

## Districts of the Free State

You will often hear locals refer to places by their older district names, but officially, the Free State is divided into:

- 🐾 **Motheo District**, home to Bloemfontein and the administrative centre.
- 🐾 **Lejweleputswa District**, the Goldfields, including Welkom and Virginia.
- 🐾 **Fezile Dabi District**, stretching up toward the Vaal River.
- 🐾 **Thabo Mofutsanyana District**, in the east, home to Clarens and the highlands.
- 🐾 **Xhariep District**, the southern and western reaches, with water, sheep and space.



Each area feels different, and each rewards a curious traveller with its own rhythm and reason.



## A province of movement

The Free State is stitched together by some of the country's most important roads. These include:

- 📍 **The N1**, a north-south highway that cuts straight through Bloemfontein.
- 📍 **The N3**, linking Durban to Johannesburg through Harrismith.
- 📍 **The N5**, which curves east to west from Harrismith to Winburg.
- 📍 **The N6**, heading from East London into the interior via Aliwal North.







What does this mean for a guide or visitor? It is often easier to pass through than to stop. But those who pause in a farm stall, a dusty museum, or a quiet dorp tend to leave with stories no GPS could have planned for.

## The people who call it home

While the land feels open, the culture here runs deep.

The Free State is home to a rich mix of communities:

-  **Basotho**, particularly in the east, where Sesotho is widely spoken.
-  **Afrikaans**-speaking farming communities with roots going back generations.
-  **Urban isiXhosa, isiZulu and Setswana** speakers, especially in larger towns.
-  **Migrants from Lesotho** and neighbouring provinces who come for work or family.

Robert Wedderburn







There is no single "Free State culture." Instead, you will find quiet churches, bustling shebeens, cattle auctions, heritage festivals, and roadside vendors selling brooms, peaches or mielies, sometimes all on the same road.



## What makes the Free State unique?





If you are guiding guests through the Free State or exploring it yourself, a few features stand out:

-  **Simplicity:** There is less gloss and more grit. That is part of the charm. You do not need five-star luxury to enjoy a five-star sky.
-  **Unexpected diversity:** From Basotho blankets in Thaba' Nchu to sandstone churches in Rosendal, the variety sneaks up on you.
-  **History in the open:** Anglo-Boer War blockhouses, mission stations, graves and statues often stand without barriers or fences. The past is not hidden here.
-  **Slower pace:** Things take time. The coffee may arrive after the toast, and the museum might open ten minutes late. But there's time to notice more.

Robert Wedderburn



## Tips for guides and travellers

-  **Know your distances:** Towns may look close on the map, but rural driving adds time. Factor this in when planning routes.
-  **Respect rural customs:** Ask before taking photos of people or livestock. Greet people properly. It matters here.
-  **Support local:** Many of the best meals, crafts and stories come from small businesses and family-run stops.
-  **Do not rush it:** The Free State rewards slow exploration. Give it time, and it will surprise you.

Robert Wedderburn



The Free State is more than "the flat bit in the middle." It is a province of proud people, far horizons, and unexpected corners. For the tour guide, it offers quiet power. For the traveller, it offers space to breathe.